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MEDIA RELEASE

NEW PROCEDURE CHANGES LIVES

By Maribeth Dwyer
UM Publications and Media Relations

It is not unusual for speech pathology and audiology majors to get practical experience along with their classroom study. Those at the University of Montana regularly work with clients referred by physicians to the UM Speech, Hearing and Language Clinic. The clinic, operated by the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, offers diagnostic evaluations, consultations and therapy.

What is unusual at the University of Montana is the training students receive in videofluorography, a procedure recently modified three years ago from Denver. Missoula Community Hospital is one of a handful of hospitals in the United States where this procedure is done--and UM students are among very few nationwide given a chance to learn about it firsthand.

The procedure is used in Missoula with modifications made by David W. Burgan, M.D., chief of radiology at Community Hospital, and Kelly Lyndes, Ph.D., associate professor of communication sciences and disorders at the University.

It is available in Missoula because Community Hospital was able to buy the equipment needed with funds raised by tax-free community industrial bonds to better serve the community.

The equipment includes a fluoroscope which takes a picture of the internal structures that make up the speech mechanism (tongue, palate, pharynx, etc.). The picture is projected on a video screen, and the sounds articulated by the owner of the speech mechanism are recorded. The viewer can watch the functioning of the mechanism and at the same time hear the sounds it produces.

(over)

NEW PROCEDURE CHANGES LIVES -- add one

"Videofluorography is an invaluable instructional tool," Lyndes says, "because it enables our students to see and hear both normal speech mechanisms and those that deviate from the norm.

"More important, it allows physicians and speech pathologists to more effectively help patients. For example, children with cleft palate have speech problems because they lack velarpharyngeal competence; that is, the palate, or roof of the mouth, doesn't close properly so air is allowed to escape through the nose in such a way that nasal sounds are produced where they shouldn't be. Only three phonemes in the English language should be nasal.

"Videofluorography aids a surgeon in determining if surgery is indicated. If it is, he or she can pinpoint the site of the difficulty and operate with greater precision than if this information were not available."

Lyndes noted that Missoula plastic surgeon Donald Murray, like Dr. Borgan a UM CSD faculty affiliate, is enthusiastic about the procedure, which he uses in his practice.

Obviously, the procedure gives the surgeon an advantage, but the greatest benefit is to the patient because speech affects a host of things in addition to language ability and social adjustment. A happy blend of advanced technology, professional skill and community support is changing lives.

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